

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
May 25 - 31, 2012

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1. Ambassador Rice at U.N. on Haoula Massacre in Syria (05-30-2012)

Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations, at the Security Council Stakeout, May 30, 2012

Ambassador Rice: Good afternoon. I will just briefly summarize the main points that we made in our discussion. We certainly agree with Kofi Annan that this is a moment where we have reached, in effect, the tipping point, with the events over the weekend being the most recent manifestation of that reality. I think we may be beginning to see the wheels coming off of this bus. And that means that what happens next and the steps that are taken by the Syrian authorities and by this Council could well be dispositive.

The reality is — as I said in our discussion — it's hard to see that there are any more than three potential outcomes at this stage. The political process — which is so crucial to the success of any transition, which is the purpose of the Annan plan — is thwarted by the ongoing, escalating, expanding violence perpetrated by the government and the reality that the opposition cannot possibly be expected to come to the table while the violence is intensifying, escalating, and the government is lying about it. So those three outcomes are as follows: The first and best outcome would be for the government of Syria to finally and immediately implement its commitments under the Annan plan as it's obliged to do under UN Security Council resolutions. That is what Kofi Annan is pressing for, and that is the surest and best way for this to get back on track and for there to be still a live prospect of a political solution. At this point, however, that does not seem to be a high probability scenario.

The second scenario would be — in the absence of that happening very quickly, that the government fulfills its commitments — would be for this Council to assume its responsibilities and

to put additional pressure on the Syrian authorities to meet its commitments. And that pressure could include sanctions of the sort that have been alluded to and discussed, and we were among those that raised that possibility.

Now, in either of those first two scenarios, the Annan plan survives, the unity of the Council is preserved, and there is a path forward aimed at putting the political process on track.

In the absence of either of those two scenarios, there seems to me to be only one other alternative, and that is indeed the worst case, which seems unfortunately at the present to be the most probable. And that is that the violence escalates, the conflict spreads and intensifies, it reaches a higher degree of severity, it involves countries in the region, it takes on increasingly sectarian forms, and we have a major crisis not only in Syria but in the region. The Council's unity is exploded, the Annan plan is dead, and this becomes a proxy conflict with arms flowing in from all sides. And members of this Council and members of the international community are left with the option only of having to consider whether they're prepared to take actions outside of the Annan plan and the authority of this Council.

That scenario obviously is the one we all have sought to avoid through support for the Annan plan. The decision rests, in the first instance, with the Syrian government, whether it will fulfill its commitments. And if it does, then the opposition has an obligation to reciprocate. If it doesn't, this Council has a responsibility to act and act swiftly and surely. And if we don't, then we are all resigning ourselves to a third scenario, which we still hope to avoid and that is why we continue to support the Annan plan. And that is why we are continuing to work with colleagues in the Council on a collective way forward.

I'll take a couple questions.

Reporter: Thank you very much Ambassador. On the Houla massacre, there is evidence that keeps coming out from the eyewitnesses, from General Mood. Is there enough evidence to point to the Syrian militia — the pro-Syrian militias — acting on behalf of the Asad regime in your mind or in the Council?

Ambassador Rice: Certainly from the U.S. point of view, we think that this is not ambiguous. There were massacres committed at close range of over a hundred people, the vast majority of them women and children. Some killed by heavy weapons, the others killed, it seems by every indication, by the shabiha militias acting on behalf of the government. We think it's quite clear cut, and we think there needs to be justice and accountability for those who committed these atrocities. And we think the information needs to be gathered so that those individuals can be held accountable.

Reporter: Was there any country that immediately dismissed the idea of sanctions or do you see an opening for discussion there? And also on the monitors, are you willing to — are you still reconsidering or considering whether or not to approve them again when it comes up for renewal?

Ambassador Rice: Well, with respect to sanctions, I think it's still fair to say that there are differences of views as to the timeliness and appropriateness of sanctions in the Council. I think there's no doubt that there are some who expressed great skepticism and some who said it's past time. So, that discussion continues, but I think it will continue not only here in New York but in capitals and in other contexts because the Syrian government has made commitments. It has blatantly violated those commitments. And I think it's quite clear, as we've said for many weeks, if they continued to do so, there should be consequences. And that's what we're up against. Let me

just finish and answer the other question. [inaudible] Well, pick. I'm answering. You're asking. So take your pick.

Reporter: Yesterday [inaudible] said that Iran had a role in the Houla massacre. I was wondering if you could expand on that.

Ambassador Rice: I can't expand on that. But what I can say is that Iran by own admission has bragged about its arming of the forces — the Syrian government forces and its own involvement inside of Syria. So I think they're saying it publically themselves. That's been our understanding for quite some while, so whether, specific to who or more broadly, they are very much complicit in the killing that is going on. Your question, your second question?

Reporter: The monitors next month?

Ambassador Rice: We've been very clear that — and I said as we voted for the resolution that established UNSMIS that — our readiness to renew the mission will be a function of whether — how we deem its effectiveness, and I reiterated that in the Council. I think there has been some important contributions that UNSMIS has made, not least to bring to public light with objectivity what happened in Houla and in other places. On the other hand, there remain limitations on and impediments to the fully effective operation of UNSMIS, and those are things that continue to concern us. But we will look at all sides of this coin, and we've asked the Secretariat to do so. Should it be augmented? Should it be downsized? Should it be shifted in some way? Should it should it be renewed? All of these are important questions. And we want a fact-based assessment of what would be best, and we will make our decisions accordingly. Let me let my colleagues [inaudible].

[U.S. Sanctions Syrian Bank to Isolate Assad Regime](#) (05-30-2012)

2. Pentagon Supports Diplomatic, Economic Pressure on Syria (05-29-2012)

By Cheryl Pellerin
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 29, 2012 – The Defense Department supports the U.S. policy of working with international partners to put diplomatic and economic pressure on Syria's government to help stem the humanitarian crisis there, the Pentagon's press secretary said here today.

George Little spoke with reporters at the Pentagon about the ongoing and destabilizing situation in Syria.

"What we're witnessing in Syria are atrocities undertaken by the Bashar al-Assad regime," he said. "That kind of violence by the regime needs to stop. We've been clear about that."

U.S. policy continues to focus, "with our international partners," Little added, "on applying diplomatic and economic pressure on the Assad regime to try to convince them that they are pursuing a reckless, inhumane and deplorable course of action."

Assad's troops massacred more than 100 Syrian men, women and children in the Houla region, north of the city of Homs, on May 25, U.S. and United Nations officials said.

The State Department today “called in Syrian charge d'affaires Zuheir Jabbour and informed him that he is no longer welcome in the United States and gave him 72 hours to depart,” spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said in a briefing.

The action was taken, she said, in response to the “absolutely indefensible, vile, despicable massacre against innocent children, women, shot at point-blank range by regime thugs -- called the shabiha -- aided and abetted by the Iranians who were actually bragging about it over the weekend.”

Nuland said the State Department is in consultation with U.S. allies and partners about what more can be done to pressure the Assad regime.

“This decision to kick out the charge was done in coordination with other countries,” she said. “Australia, Canada, Spain, the United Kingdom, Italy, France and Germany also took the same action today.”

At the Pentagon briefing, Little said the focus remains on the diplomatic and economic track “but at the end of the day we in the Department of Defense have a responsibility to look at the full spectrum of options and to make them available if they're requested.”

Little added, “We share the shock over the atrocities that we're seeing in Syria with our international partners. And we have an interest, of course, in stability in the region.”

The United States has for decades played a key role in trying to provide peace, stability and security for that region, he said.

“When there is a crisis like this that erupts that has the potential to cause not just humanitarian disasters but also could cascade outside of Syria, potentially, that's a concern to countries of the region and to countries like the United States outside the region,” Little said.

Defense Department officials have been in regular contact with international partners and countries in the region to express “our collective dismay at what's happening in Syria and to try to see if there are things we can do to bring pressure to bear on the Assad regime to stop what they're doing against their own people,” the press secretary said.

“That's of course the prudent thing to do,” Little added, “when you see a crisis like this in a very important region of the world.”

Biographies:

[George Little](#)

Related Sites:

[Transcript](#)

3. Assad Regime Responsible for Haoula Massacre, U.S. Says (05-29-2012)

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States joined several other nations in expelling a senior Syrian diplomat in response to the massacre of more than 100 men, women and children in the Syrian village of Haoula on May 25, and says it will continue its efforts to increase pressure on Bashar al-Assad's regime.

According to the United Nations, 108 people were shot and killed at close range in the village, located near the city of Homs. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said May 29 that the responsibility for the massacre rests "firmly at the feet of the Assad regime" and its militia group, the Shabiha.

Nuland said Syrian charge d'affaires Zuheir Jabbour was called to the State Department earlier May 29 and informed by Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs Jeffrey Feltman that "he is no longer welcome in the United States" and had 72 hours to depart the country.

Along with the United States, Australia, Canada, Spain, the United Kingdom, Italy, France, and Germany have expelled senior Syrian diplomats in the wake of the massacre.

"We took this action in response to the ... absolutely indefensible, vile, despicable massacre against innocent children, women, shot at point-blank range by regime thugs, the Shabiha, aided and abetted by the Iranians, who were actually bragging about it over the weekend," she said, referring to a statement by the deputy head of Iran's Quds Force "saying publicly that they were proud of the role that they had played in training and assisting the Syrian forces, and look what this has wrought."

She said the Shabiha force, created by the Assad regime, is made of up of young men who are hired to "indiscriminately wreak vengeance and do this kind of hand-to-hand violence" as was seen in Haoula, and it is modeled on Iran's Basij force, using the tactics that the Basij deployed to suppress the Iranian people after the disputed presidential election in 2009.

In an earlier statement, Nuland also noted that the assault on the civilians involved "tanks and artillery — weapons that only the regime possesses," and that there were reports that many families were summarily executed in their homes by regime forces.

"We hold the Syrian government responsible for this slaughter of innocent lives. This massacre is the most unambiguous indictment to date of the Syrian government's flagrant violations of its U.N. Security Council obligations under resolutions 2042 and 2043 along with the regime's ongoing threat to peace and security," Nuland said.

Speaking to reporters, Nuland welcomed Russia's apparent willingness to have a full investigation into the massacre, and said she hoped it could be a turning point in Russia's approach to Syria's 15-month conflict.

"We think it's undisputable what that investigation is going to show. It's going to show that these were regime-sponsored thugs who went into villages, went into homes and killed children at point-blank range and their parents, and that the responsibility goes right back to the Assad regime," she said.

On May 26, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton condemned the massacre and said, "Those who perpetrated this atrocity must be identified and held to account."

[Clinton said](#) the United States stands in solidarity with the Syrian people and those who took to the streets across the country to peacefully denounce the killings in Haoula, and said the Obama administration will work with the international community to "intensify our pressure on Assad and his cronies, whose rule by murder and fear must come to an end."

4. Panetta: Pakistan's Jailing of Doctor 'Unhelpful' to U.S. Relations (05-27-2012)

By Nick Simeone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 27, 2012 – Pakistan's jailing of a doctor who helped the United States find and kill Osama bin Laden a year ago is undermining efforts by both countries to improve relations, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta said in an interview that aired today.

"It is so difficult to understand and so disturbing that they would sentence this doctor to 33 years for helping in the search for the most notorious terrorist in our times," Panetta said in a May 25 taping of ABC's "This Week" program. "This doctor was not working against Pakistan. He was working against al-Qaeda and I hope that, ultimately, Pakistan understands that because what they have done here, I think, does not help in the effort to try to re-establish a relationship between the United States and Pakistan."

Last week, a court in northwestern Pakistan convicted Dr. Shakil Afridi of treason and sentenced him to 33 years in prison. In January, Panetta confirmed publically that Afridi helped the U.S gain access to bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, by providing "very helpful" information. In the interview that aired today, he made clear the Pakistani court's decision could undermine months of efforts to get relations back on track.

"What they did with this doctor doesn't help in the effort to try to do that," he said.

Several key events, including the secret U.S mission to kill bin Laden last May as well as NATO's accidental killing of 24 Pakistani soldiers near the Afghan/Pakistan border in November, have severely tested U.S.-Pakistani relations. Six months after Pakistan closed overland NATO supply lines in response to the border incident, Panetta confirmed both countries are still working on terms for re-opening the ground routes. There have been multiple reports that Pakistan is demanding a steep increase in the fees it will collect from vehicles crossing the border.

"They're negotiating what that price ought to be," the secretary said. "We're not about to get gouged in the price. We want a fair price."

Panetta said the United States and Pakistan remain allies in the fight against terrorism but acknowledged the relationship has strengths and weaknesses. "This has been one of the most complicated relationships that we've had working with Pakistan. We have to continue to work at it. It is important. This is a country that has nuclear weapons. This is a country that still is critical in that region of the world. It's an up and down relationship."

Panetta's interview with ABC came just days after nuclear talks between Iran and six world powers aimed at freezing Tehran's uranium enrichment program ended without apparent progress. Panetta was asked whether the U.S. has a plan ready to strike Iran's nuclear sites if diplomacy fails to curb what the West suspects is an Iranian covert nuclear weapons program.

"We are prepared for any contingency in that part of the world," he said. "But our hope is that these matters can be resolved diplomatically."

Biographies:

[Leon E. Panetta](#)

5. 'Lead Your Country,' Biden Tells West Point Grads (05-26-2012)

By Jim Garamone

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 26, 2012 – West Point is even more important to the country today than when Gen. George Washington called it "the key to the continent," Vice President Joe Biden said during graduation exercises at the U.S. Military Academy today.

In 1777, West Point was a fortified area along the Hudson River that stopped the British from splitting the colonies. Today, the home of the military academy produces leaders who shape America and answer every call to duty the country makes, the vice president said.

Biden spoke to the 1,032 cadets who received their diplomas and were commissioned into service. He also spoke to their families and friends gathered under a hot sun at Michie Stadium.

The class represents the best of the 9/11 generation, the vice president said, adding that the cadets "are more than worthy of the proud legacy you inherit today."

The cadets, like all men and women who joined the military after 9/11, knew they would be deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, Biden said. "Hundreds of thousands of you have laced up those combat boots and walked across those barren deserts or snow-capped mountains, where 24 members of this graduating class have already served," he said.

The graduates will be commissioned officers, but they will also be much more, the vice president said. They will learn the intricacies of tribal politics, they will learn how to run a school system, put in irrigation, train indigenous forces and much more.

These young officers must learn counterinsurgency doctrine and apply it, but they must be ready for changes in the world, too, Biden said. The United States is working to strengthen NATO so it can continue being the most successful alliance in history, he said. And as the war in Iraq has ended and the war in Afghanistan ends, the military can spend time on other priorities including the Asia-Pacific region.

"The United States has long been and will remain a Pacific power, and a critical provider of peace, prosperity and security in this vital region," Biden told the cadets. "The most critical relationship to get right is that between the United States and China. Every day the affairs of our nations and the

livelihoods of our citizens grow more connected. How we manage this relationship between the world's two largest economies ... will help shape the 21st century.”

The United States also is working with other emerging powers like India, Brazil, Turkey and South Africa. “All these efforts are helping advance America's interests at home and around the world,” he said.

The new strategic defense strategy will affect these new officers. The strategy provides “a more agile, flexible force prepared for future challenges, better able to confront the aggressors and project power with strong partners to share the burden and smart investments in cutting edge capabilities,” he said.

America's unique position in the world requires the finest fighting force, Biden said. “And that's exactly what this strategy does,” he said.

The U.S. Military Academy has prepared the new officers to face new challenges and lead. They have “the minds to adapt to tomorrow's horizons, from cyberspace to outer space,” he said.

“West Point is in the business of producing great leaders,” Biden said. “Class of 2012, this is your destiny – to lead your country.”

Related Sites:

[Photo Essay: Biden, Officials Attend U.S. Military Academy at West Point Commencement Speech](#)

6. State's Gordon Praises U.S.-European Strategic Alignment (05-25-2012)

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 25 May 2012

Washington — The strategic alignment between the United States and Europe is at its best ever, according to Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Philip H. Gordon.

“This ... is not an accident or the fortuitous or temporary alignment of geopolitical tectonic plates,” Gordon said in Washington May 23. “It is ... the result of a deliberate and conscious strategy to invest in a partnership with the world's most advanced, military-capable and democratic peoples who share our values and ideals.”

Gordon said that when President Obama took office in 2009, U.S. relations with Europe were in need of repair because of “unprecedented divisions” over Iraq, questions about European engagement in Afghanistan and disagreement about how to handle Iran's nuclear program. In addition, U.S. relations with Russia were at their lowest point since the end of the Cold War, Gordon said.

The investment in the U.S.-European partnership has returned “real dividends,” Gordon said, such as the nearly 40,000 European troops fighting alongside U.S. forces in Afghanistan in “NATO's largest-ever overseas deployment.”

He said U.S.-European cooperation was at the core of the NATO-led campaign to back the Libyan rebels' ouster of Muammar Qadhafi. In NATO's involvement in the Kosovo conflict in 1999, the

United States provided 85 percent of the airstrikes, Gordon said. In contrast, in Libya, the United States flew 25 percent of the sorties, while France and the United Kingdom together accounted for 40 percent.

With regard to Iran, the United States and Europe have achieved “unprecedented unity” in the dual-track approach of putting pressure on the regime while keeping the door open to diplomacy, he said. “It is the common pressure that we are putting on the Iranians that we think has brought them back to the negotiating table,” Gordon said.

The assistant secretary said the partnership is evident in dealing with remaining political and economic issues in Europe. Those issues include the integration of all the Balkan countries into “Euro-Atlantic institutions,” settling unrest in Moldova and pressing for more political and economic openness in Ukraine and Belarus, Gordon said.

He added that under President Obama’s leadership, the United States has made progress in developing more productive relations with Russia. The guiding principle of the Obama administration toward Russia has been to “cooperate on areas of mutual interest while speaking very plainly about areas of disagreement,” he said. This approach has brought agreements on missile reduction, civil nuclear energy cooperation, military transit arrangements for Afghanistan and “unprecedented cooperation” on Iran sanctions, he said.

Gordon said the United States is committed to helping Europe deal with its financial crisis.

“The European Union is our largest trade and investment partner. The EU and its member states account for 58 percent of overseas development aid, and when you combine that with U.S. spending, we together provide 80 percent of the world’s development assistance. We clearly need strong and prosperous European allies,” he said.

Remarks by Philip H. Gordon, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs
Keynote Address at the 2012 Center on the United States and Europe (CUSE) Annual Conference
Washington, DC, May 23, 2012
